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TAGS: [SENV](#) [EPET](#) [PGOV](#) [KU](#)

SUBJECT: KUWAITI OFFICIAL: WATER CRISIS OVERBLOWN, NEW
DESALINATION PLANT TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM

REF: A. KUWAIT 2267

[1](#)B. KUWAIT 1846

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. In a June 20 meeting with Econoff, Kuwaiti water official Suhaila Marafi said that news reports, campaign propaganda, and rumor have exaggerated the extent of Kuwait's water shortage, and that the planned July 21 opening of a new desalination plant in Subiya will solve supply problems. Marafi said the gap between supply and demand is between 2 and 5 million gallons per day (mgpd) and is compensated with withdrawals from Kuwait's strategic water

reserve. The Ministry of Energy, which controls water production and distribution, has lowered pressure to decrease consumption. In response to rapidly increasing prices for water from private tankers (Refs A & B), the Ministry of Commerce will implement a program involving pre-paid cards to prevent price gouging. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) On June 20, Econoff met with Suhaila Marafi, Director of the Studies and Research Department at the Ministry of Electricity and Water, which falls under the Ministry of Energy (MOE). While acknowledging that consumption exceeds supply, Marafi downplayed the extent of Kuwait's water shortage, attributing the talk of "crisis" to overzealous media, campaigning politicians taking swipes at the government, and rumor. She said current production from Kuwait's five desalination plants (Doha East, Doha West, Shuwaikh, Shuaiba, and Al-Zour) averages 319 million gallons per day (mgpd) and that consumption is currently averaging 322 mgpd, with the difference made up from withdrawals from Kuwait's strategic water reserve. The new desalination plant in Subiya, due to begin production on July 21, will solve the water shortage by providing 50 mgpd of fresh water, far exceeding the current deficit. She did, however, note that demand has increased by 14% over June 2005, and that she expects demand to rise further in the coming years. (Note: Historically, demand has risen 6-8% per year in Kuwait. End note.)

[1](#)3. (SBU) Marafi agreed with news reports and Post's own assessments (Refs A & B) that Kuwait's water problems are almost entirely self-inflicted. She stated that average fresh water consumption in Kuwait is 104 gallons per day per person, a very high rate given the lack of agriculture in the country. (Note: Post's calculation of 326 mgpd used by a population of 2.8 million yields a figure of 116 gallons per day per person. End note.) She expressed particular annoyance with the insistence of many Kuwaitis on washing sidewalks and roads in front of their houses, noting the

quixotic futility of the practice given Kuwait's constant dust. Marafi said she had proposed to the Council of Ministers that the MOE purchase 200,000 trigger-operated spray nozzles to reduce the amount of water wasted while washing sidewalks, but her proposal was rejected. Another target of Marafi's frustration was the resistance of "Islamists" in the government to the introduction of treated water into the drinking water supply. She noted that this is common practice in many countries and poses no significant health risk, but that in Kuwait treated water is only used for irrigation.

14. (SBU) In an effort to decrease consumption, Marafi said the MOE reduces water pressure during the daytime. In response to lowered pressure, many residents have purchased and installed pumps that pump water from the mains to storage tanks on their roofs. This practice forces other residents downstream on the same water line, who have no water as long as a pump is operating upstream, to purchase water from privately-owned tankers. More disruptions lead more people to install pumps, further aggravating the pressure problems. The price of water from tankers continues to rise, reaching as high as \$87.50 per 1,000 gallons, versus an official price of \$6.13 per 1,000 gallons. To stem price gouging, the Ministry of Commerce has announced plans for residents to use pre-paid cards to buy from tankers.

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